

# EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT *UPDATE*

October/November 1999

## 'Dynamic Duo' pummel Virginia

Virginia residents may not have seen fire, but they definitely encountered the devastating effects of wind and rain when hurricanes Dennis and Floyd struck in rapid succession last month.

Moving in a meandering fashion, Dennis hit the city of Hampton with surgical precision, cutting a swathe through the Devonshire assisted-living center and the Wyndham, Township and Signature Way apartment complexes and causing approximately \$7.7 million in damage.

Floyd was much less selective, sharing the wealth among 48 localities declared eligible for disaster assistance with estimated damages of over \$182 million.

As Floyd made his exit, Virginia Power estimated a total average of more than 700,000 customers were without power at one time or another.

In addition, almost 300 roads were closed or impassable, water service was disrupted to the city of Portsmouth and Southampton County, and communications were cut off to the city of Franklin, most of Southampton County, and parts of Isle of Wight County and Suffolk.

With the extent of damages, it is miraculous that the death toll of five persons was not considerably higher.

Affected localities continue to assess damages and response

to the disaster(s) and each has a unique story to tell. Here are just a few:

### Chesapeake

"Never say never" could easily summarize the situation in Chesapeake and many other affected localities. Though they were poised in a location to be impacted by winds, the city instead experienced widespread flooding in areas that had not flooded in an institutional memory of two to three generations, according to Chief Stephen Best, Coordinator of Emergency Services.

"The effects of Hurricane Floyd were compounded by earlier precipitation from Hurricane Dennis and a frontal system that followed it, which dumped about five inches of rain," said Best. "The National Wildlife Refuge reported 19 inches before Floyd and eight to 12 more inches afterward. A lot of it drained into the canal and overflowed the banks with water anywhere from three to four feet deep. Some roads were just completely impassable."

Best says that this event reinforced the need to be self-reliant during a disaster or emergency and to pre-deploy resources at various parts of the city in anticipation of a category three or four storm.



*Picking up the pieces. A Franklin resident surveys the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd flooding. (FEMA News Photo by Liz Roll).*

Though their plans had called for accessing state and federal resources, Best says this assistance was delayed in reaching them due to the disruptions in the state's transportation network.

The event also highlighted the need to customize messages to the public. Best says issues affecting one part of the 354 square-mile city did not apply to other areas and they needed to develop flyers and a distribution system to disseminate this information.

He lauds the efforts of his staff, volunteers, and civic organizations who sometimes delivered flyers door to door

and calls the effort a success that took public information to a new level.

### Franklin

One of the hardest hit localities, Franklin was first deluged with a substantial amount of rain that resulted in flash flooding. Then, as the floodwaters were going down, the Blackwater River rose.

This rapid succession of events taxed the city's resources right off the bat, according to Coordinator of Emergency Services Dan Eggleston.

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# 'Richmond, we have a problem' ...

**S**outhampton County and the city of Franklin might as well have been on the moon when the rising floodwaters of Hurricane Floyd cut off their communications with the outside world. Using a localized version of the now famous Apollo 13 distress call, officials in these localities relayed their plight using the services of amateur radio operators.

As the only form of communications into and out of these localities, Virginia's Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) relayed all message traffic for state and local officials, relief agencies and private citizens, according to Tony Amato, Assistant State RACES Officer for Area A.

"I was down in the water Friday [Sept. 17] morning at about 2 a.m.," said Amato. "We had approximately 147 hands [from across the state] involved in this exercise who put in well over 9,000 hours of volunteer time."

He says they handled Med-Flight requests out of Franklin to VDES as well as ancillary traffic from both communities such as requests for ice, blankets, water, Red Cross assistance, and requests for feeding facilities.

"They were our link to the outside world, a link that really became a lifeline to us," says Southampton Sheriff Vernie Francis.

When the National Weather Service in Wakefield, Va., lost their communications, RACES stepped in as the only means to transmit river flood statements to localities.

"Amateur radio has fallen out of favor because of newer technologies," Amato says. "However, the more complicated technology gets, the more prone it is to failure. We don't have that problem. We have a large chunk of the communications spectrum that we can use for emergency communications and also have a tactical repeater in Williamsburg that just about covers all of Area A."

While amateur radio has been labeled by some as "archaic," Frank Mackey, State RACES Officer, stresses that it is one of the most reliable forms of communication. In fact, amateurs can set up a communications medium using self-contained mobile units in a matter of minutes.

When lives are in the balance, those minutes can be critical. Amato points to two instances that required immediate Med-Flight assistance (kidney dialysis and complications from abdominal surgery).

With so much to offer, Mackey laments that most emergency managers don't know about their capabilities. He hopes to rectify this problem with a video currently in development, targeted to this audience. He says the thrust of the tape is to tell the RACES story in the words of the public safety professionals who relied on amateur radio in the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd. VEOC Deputy Director of Operations Fred Vincent is one of those who will be singing the praises of amateur radio.

"Since my arrival at VDES in 1989 as the Communications Officer, I have been 'preaching' the value of using ham radio operators in a support role for both state and local government," says Vincent. "Both levels of government use the telephone as their primary emergency management communications link. When the phones are overloaded or aren't working, our tasks become difficult if not downright impossible to coordinate."

Though they are called "amateurs," these volunteers are well trained and regulated by state code.

Amato says certified RACES operators must complete a six-hour basic course and four hours of workshop training per year as well as participate in annual simulated



**Building a lifeline.** RACES Va. Section Mgr. Lynn Gahagan from Chesapeake, Va., takes a shift at the Franklin EOC. (Courtesy photo)

emergency tests.

"They can use any mode available to amateur radio in multiple bands from high-frequency single sideband to satellite communications, voice – data – television – ..." adds Vincent. "No governmental group at the local or state level has this degree of flexibility or widespread coverage or has 'practiced' in the emergency mode to the degree these volunteers have."

To learn more, log on to the state Amateur Radio Emergency Services (ARES)/RACES Web site at [www.aresva.org](http://www.aresva.org).

## HurWin95 used to plot storm tracks

**W**hen hurricanes Dennis and Floyd bore down on the Commonwealth, the VDES Emergency Operations Center used new and improved HurWin95 software to track them.

Also known as HURREVAC, this program is the product of a FEMA and Army Corps of Engineers Hurricane Evacuation Study produced exclusively for the emergency management community.

It combines data from hurricane evacuation studies, flooding scenarios and National Weather Service and National Hurricane Center models into a single integrated program.

Fred Vincent, VDES deputy director of operations, says they were able to "see" the storms and probable wind swaths based on NHC models and forecasts from HurWin95. He says the ability to download the storm information from the Internet saved staff valuable time which used to be spent entering the data manually.

Both the National Weather Service and the Federal Emergency Management Agency have adopted HURREVAC as the official single source of tracking and forecasting information for tropical storms and hurricanes. Now, VDES is seeking statewide adoption of this software.

"This is the first time we have encouraged local emergency services coordinators to use the same software," says George Urquhart, Director of the VDES Preparedness and Mitigation Division. "The danger of using different sources or models is that it can lead to differing opinions regarding protective decisions and actions."

All emergency services coordinators can receive the software free by registering at [www.hurrevac.com](http://www.hurrevac.com) and will receive instructions for downloading and activating the new HURREVAC. For more information, contact George Urquhart at (804) 897-6583.



# EMAC staffers fill the bill

by Bob Lambert, VDES Reservist



**Meeting needs.** EMAC staffers Dante Gliniecki, Mo., and Dan Grimes, Va. VOAD, contact groups in search of volunteers for clean-up efforts (Photo by Bob Lambert).

As soon as forecasters sized up the magnitude of Hurricane Floyd, VDES hit the phones to mobilize additional help from other states under the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC).

Barely a day later, the first of some two-dozen experienced disaster recovery specialists arrived to provide assistance to flood victims.

"We are extremely grateful to the assisting states for sending such good people to help," Va. EMAC Coordinator Bill Edmonson said. "They are making a big contribution to our disaster recovery effort."

EMAC provides a forum and structure to interstate mutual aid. The plans and procedures resolve up front such issues as liability, workers compensation, pre-designated authority and reimbursement. As a result, the EMAC concert of "states helping states" can be implemented quickly and efficiently to respond to a major disaster.

There are currently 27 EMAC member states with others soon to follow. The two dozen EMAC staffers helping in Virginia came from Florida, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri and West Virginia. EMAC personnel are making a major difference in getting the disaster relief job done.

Janet Bonnema, based in South Florida, buttoned up her home as Floyd approached. Before she could take the plywood off, she got the call to come to Virginia. Usually mutual aid staffers perform duties similar to what they did back home. But not always.

Bonnema left her job in environmental resource permitting in the South Florida Water Management District to work in Public Assistance in the Virginia Disaster Field Office.

For her, the needed skills were in processing applicants for disaster aid.

"It's all about helping people — whether it's helping them get a permit or recover from flooding," Bonnema said.

Florida has done an excellent job of preparing its employees to handle the frequent hurricanes that hit the state — skills that are valuable anywhere, she said.

"We have placed a heavy emphasis on emergency management and training," Bonnema says. "In our job we will help anybody with about anything. They come to us because they know we will help. We hold their hands and shed a tear with them."

Dante L. Gliniecki, a statewide volunteer coordinator for the Missouri State Emergency Management Agency in Jefferson City, Mo., handled similar duties for Floyd. An EMAC exchange staffer, his Virginia assignment fit right in. He and Daniel Grimes of the Virginia Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) set up the Donations Coordination Center to connect donations with flood victim needs.

"I couldn't think of a more rewarding job," Gliniecki says. "It's been exciting and challenging — helping people when they need it most. It's been a terrific job."

More than just having a rewarding experience, Gliniecki picked up ideas to take back to Missouri, especially from the Virginia Recovery Task Force, similar to the one in Missouri.

Merrin Crowder, with the Individual and Family Grant Program in the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency, accepted her first EMAC out-of-state assignment to help with Floyd.

A former Woodbridge, Va., resident, Crowder had been an emergency management planner in Mississippi before her current job in the Individual Family Grant Program in Mississippi. "I got a lot of satisfaction out of IFG work because you are working to help people with their problems," Crowder says. "When you finish a particular assignment, you can see that you really did a good job."

"We had a huge job to do," Virginia State Emergency Services Coordinator Michael Cline says. "It stretched our resources."

"The assistance from EMAC has been invaluable. The two dozen staffers brought a high energy level and a wealth of valuable skills both at headquarters and in the field. We appreciate what they did for us."

## Trial by flood

New Hurricane Planner T. Stewart Baker had only been on the job a few days when Virginia fell victim to the one-two punch of Dennis and Floyd. With 17 years experience in emergency management, he was more than up to the challenge.

Baker comes to VDES from the town of Chincoteague where he served as both Town Manager and Emergency Services Coordinator and was instrumental in developing the town's first emergency operations plan. He has served as both chairman and vice chairman of the Hampton Roads Emergency Management Committee as well as a member of VEMA and the Delmarva Emergency Task Force.

"Stewart knows the people, processes, politics and issues," says George Foresman, Deputy State Coordinator of Emergency Services. "This is a rare opportunity to get someone of his skill and caliber with strong credentials in emergency management and local government."

Baker holds a bachelor's degree in biology and sociology from Virginia Wesleyan College. He has also completed the FEMA Hurricane Preparedness Course at the National Hurricane Center in Miami, Florida, as well as numerous VDES training courses.

Born and raised on Chincoteague Island, Baker has resided there for the past 22 years with his wife, Valerie, and their two sons, Timothy and Brandon. Baker says living on an island has given him a unique understanding of the effects of hurricanes and nor'easters and the need for preparedness.

"Having been a local coordinator for 17 years, I have a keen understanding of some of the issues emergency managers are facing," says Baker.

"My initial goal is to touch base with coordinators in all our coastal jurisdictions to offer assistance in day-to-day operations, facilitate open communication, and assist with any needs in planning and recovery."

Baker says now is the time for the state and local jurisdictions to review their plans and is looking to implement recommended changes to the state plan before next year's hurricane season.



**Assessing the damages.** Governor Jim Gilmore confers with VDES State Coordinator Michael Cline (far left), FEMA Director James Lee Witt (right center), and Congressman Bobby Scott prior to the first public announcement of a disaster declaration for Virginia localities.

## Southampton County: Road closed

**S**outhampton County had its share of lost power and communications (including 911) as well as access to numerous primary and secondary roads. Coordinator of Emergency Services Michael Johnson says flooding in residential areas damaged or destroyed about 180 households.

"We had a number of obstacles, any one of which alone would have been difficult," said Johnson. "The combination hurt us the most. With all the rain we had previously, 75 percent of our secondary routes had sections under water or parts washed out."

Johnson says he got a personal glimpse of the magnitude of the situation when he tried to return home after checking on the shelter they opened in advance of Floyd. What should have been a 20-minute ride turned into a 90-minute adventure. Then, he and other employees had difficulty getting into town immediately following the storm — unable to travel more than a mile in any direction.

He says transportation was their major focus initially with access into and out of Boykins and Branchville cut off by floodwaters. The sheriff had to contact the National Guard to come in and rescue residents of flooded neighborhoods. The water system and wastewater treatment plant were also down and they had to coordinate delivery of bottled water.

"The thing that stood out the most to me is that our plan was in good shape but, when it came down to implementation, we didn't have the human resources to augment it," says Johnson. "We had employees who went home on Wednesday and couldn't get back for days. We were trying to get enough people in to keep the government going."



**Waterfront property.** One of many flooded neighborhoods. (Courtesy photo)

## ('Dynamic Duo' - Franklin, cont'd from page 1)

"There isn't much historical data on the Blackwater, so no one could tell us when it would crest or how much," says Eggleston. "It flooded much of downtown,



**A city under water.** Aerial view of the flooding (Photo by Janet Clements). including the EOC, which had to be relocated to another firehouse. In all, we had 180-190 structures that had to be evacuated."

Petroleum, pesticide, and herbicide spills tainted the rising waters which engulfed this small community and created an island with no power or telephone service. Eggleston says a timely assessment of their situation was key to a successful response effort. Status reports outlining the situation and assistance needed were immediately forwarded to the state EOC to get the ball rolling in accessing state and federal resources.

The National Guard rapidly responded to aid in search and rescue efforts. Eggleston also credits VDES and its federal partners with a hazmat response that lessened the environmental impact of the spills and also averted the threat of spontaneous combustion from fermenting peanuts at a processing plant in town.

Eggleston says coordination has become one of his greatest challenges in the aftermath of the storm. They not only had to keep their government running with all city records lost, but also had to interface with an arsenal of agencies converging on their community.

"We had over 500-600 people here at one time," says Eggleston. "We always knew the resources were there but didn't know they could be here so quickly."

Though Eggleston says their emergency operations plan worked, he sees a real need to train city staff in the incident management system, which explains where they fit into the organizational structure and how they interface with state and federal agencies. He says the Virginia Department of Forestry was a tremendous help in setting up the planning process and disseminating information about organizational structure and plans for the day.

As tons of debris are removed to make way for rebirth, Eggleston says the people of Franklin deserve a big pat on the back for their quick thinking and tenacity. "I think everyone here was a little surprised at our capabilities," says Eggleston.

## Lowering the floodgates: The Vigil of Newport News



**Water rescue.** Joy Bailey escapes rising water engulfing the Brookside townhomes (Photo: Gary Knapp, *The Virginian Pilot*).

**W**ith rainfall measuring 16.57 inches, Newport News also faced significant flooding, evacuating more than 2,000 residents during and immediately following Hurricane Floyd. Coordinator of Emergency Management Jack Williamson says the city's Waterworks Department stood vigil over three dams to relieve water levels and prevent overflow and potential breakage. The fire department also pre-positioned johnboats at each fire station for possible evacuations.

"At Lee Hall, they were lowering the gate six inches at a time to keep water from going over the earthen part of the dam, washing it out and causing it to break," says Williamson. "They were monitoring it two to three times an hour and coordinating with the National Weather Service. The public needs to know how intense the situation was."

"We had identified every single residence potentially in harm's way and were prepared to go in motion to alert people and evacuate them in sufficient time. We had police and fire working together to rescue people, using boats and whatever means they had. When you look at what went on (1600 homes evacuated) and consider we had no loss of life, I think that says a lot."

Williamson lauds the city's comprehensive response following the disaster as well. Social Services, Codes Compliance, Police, and Public Works were out in force assessing the situation and addressing public safety issues. Like Chesapeake, Newport News also put together information packets and distributed them to flood victims in affected areas.

Williamson says special needs and pet evacuations/sheltering presented the biggest challenges. After evacuating a few hundred apartments with elderly and disabled residents, shelter staff found they didn't have a sufficient quantity of wheelchairs (electric wheelchairs could not be put in the johnboats). The shelter situation was also disorienting to many elderly patients. After noticing their health beginning to deteriorate, Williamson says city officials rented a floor of the Comfort Inn and hired two nurses along with social services staff.

"Some didn't have a change of clothes and didn't tell anyone or couldn't get to the bathroom because they didn't know where it was," explains Williamson. "The closer, more controlled environment made a big difference — calming them down and reassuring them."

## Portsmouth: Flooding knocks out community water supply

**W**ater posed a different kind of problem for the city of Portsmouth. When Floyd knocked out their water treatment plant, they simply didn't have enough of it to supply the needs of their citizens.

According to Fire Chief and Emergency Services Coordinator Hugh Osborne, coordination was both the key to the success of their operations and one of his biggest headaches. He says it is imperative to have representatives in the EOC for each participating agency.

"Coordination between the jurisdiction, state and federal players is key," says Osborne. "You can't do that over the phone with someone 200 miles away. Until I had a National Guard body and a Corps [of Engineers] body and a FEMA body in my EOC, it was hectic. Until I could put my hands on these people, we weren't getting a lot done."

Osborne also cites the need for a "full-time, 24-hour public information person" during an event of this scale. He says they needed someone to monitor current news activity to correct misinformation that was being broadcast and to provide regular updates to the media. This information flow relates to another lesson learned.

"We should only deliver the facts — not promises," says Osborne. He says he announced a water delivery in a news conference based on estimates from his state and federal contacts. Unfortunately, road closures delayed the arrival of the water and resulted in some "very unhappy people."



**A precious commodity.** Specialists Luis Naranjo (left) and Wayne Lafollette of Company B, 229th Engineers, haul water at a Portsmouth distribution point. (Photo by Capt. A.A. Puryear, 29th Infantry Division).



# Water, water everywhere ... almost

**A**fter a dry, sweltering summer, the citizens of the Commonwealth experienced both feast and famine in the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd with “water everywhere” in some localities and nary a drop for others to drink.

Long known for its scenic diversity, the state became a study in contrasts with localized flooding in southeastern and south-central Virginia and drought conditions continuing in the west.

In August, the state’s Drought Monitoring Task Force urged local governments to prepare to implement drought contingency plans while Governor Jim Gilmore mobilized the National Guard to assist in transporting hay and water to stricken farmers.

When it came to combating drought conditions in their areas, a number of localities also took the spigot by the handles to release an outpouring of state and local assistance. Bedford County formed its own drought monitoring task force.

“We met initially to put together a bullet list of department resources and people who could assist in some type of relief effort,” said Bedford County Director of Public Safety David Nichols. “We identified sources of potable and non-potable water and looked at the county from a geographic standpoint pinpointing the locations of those who requested assistance.”

Nichols says they created a total of six fill stations across the county (four non-potable and two potable) that were open from 4 to 8 p.m. to accommodate the schedules of part-time farmers. All totaled, the Bedford and National Guard water points have pumped more than 22,000 gallons into the county.

Russell County has also implemented its own drought relief program. Emergency Services Coordinator Judy Cooling says their locality is doing preliminary engineering reports to extend municipal water lines into the communities that are most adversely affected. In the meantime, other immediate measures have been implemented.

“Russell County took the initiative to provide drinking water to citizens with inadequate or severely depleted supplies,” said Cooling. “We are working with the

health department to ensure we have potable water available by purchasing 1,000-gallon tanks and contracting with the Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission to provide the truck to transport the water.”

“We review requests on a case-by-case basis and are trying to concentrate on areas where the largest population would be affected,” explains Cooling. When we evaluate these requests, we look for opportunities to place tanks in close-knit areas that are accessible to all (individual property, community center, church, and storage buildings).”

“We separated potable and non-potable water operations and requested that local fire departments assist in hauling water for household use,” explains Cooling.

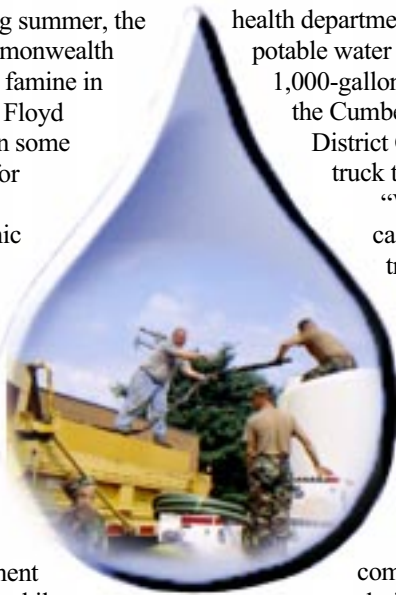
“To date, we have provided water to about 125 households.”

Though Hurricane Floyd didn’t provide immediate relief to these parched populations, later storms have eased the situation in Bedford as Nichols says they received more than 12 inches of rain in the month of September. Russell County wasn’t so lucky. With an average of 2.94 inches of rainfall across the county since Aug. 24, the Russell County Disaster Relief Task Force is still discussing long-term recovery.

Cooling says they are now coordinating with VDES and Donations Management to provide bottled water for Russell, Wise, Dickenson and Lee counties. People Inc., a public service agency, is also available to assist income eligible residents of Russell and Dickenson counties with costs of replacement wells.

Though distribution logistics is still an issue, Cooling says they have learned the importance of purchasing bottled water. Cooling says they expect to continue providing potable water in 1,000 gallon storage tanks, averaging 6,000-10,000 gallons per week, but will eventually face the financial burden of storing the tanks once the drought subsides.

*(Photo of National Guard water delivery courtesy of Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.)*



## In the Spotlight



**I**n the news ... After 15 years of service, **Janet L. Clements** has been named as the agency’s Director of Public Affairs.

A familiar face to many in the emergency management community, she has spearheaded the state’s public information response to 14 presidentially-declared disasters and numerous emergencies and incidents.

In her current position, Clements will serve as the agency’s primary spokesperson working with the media and promoting hazard awareness and disaster preparedness throughout Virginia.

She says she is committed to supporting local government and sees herself as part of an emergency management partnership team with the common goal of preparing and protecting the public.

One of Clements’ goals is to pull together a state-local PIO resource team to assist localities who need additional staff to respond to large-scale emergencies (i.e., the city of Franklin following Hurricane Floyd).

Clements says emergency managers can also expect to receive a high level of customer service from what will now be called the Public Affairs Office, not only in preparedness campaigns and disaster response but also in building partnerships and interactive communication through the agency’s Web site.

Committed to “making a difference,” Clements shares her expertise in public relations and crisis communications as an adjunct instructor for the Emergency Management Institute in Emmitsburg, Md., and the University of Richmond.

“I look forward to continuing to work closely with Virginia’s emergency services community,” Clements says.

“The VDES Public Affairs Office will continue our commitment to supporting both local and state efforts to communicate our preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation messages to all Virginians.”

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# HAZ MAT



## Grassroots recovery

by Bob Lambert, VDES Reservist

### Hazmat in high waters

by Greg Britt, VDES Hazmat Field Manager

**W**hen Hurricane Floyd moved through North Carolina and Virginia on Sept. 16, it appeared to leave behind the normal aftermath of strong winds and heavy rain. It was not until late evening and the wee hours of the next morning that the full devastation was realized.



*Sea of sheen. A team assesses a petroleum release at the S.W. Rawls Oil Company (FEMA News Photo by Liz Roll).*

As rising floodwaters displaced citizens and disrupted communications and transportation networks across the state, another crisis loomed on the horizon for the city of Franklin. The same waters that cut off the city from the outside world also contaminated the downtown area with floating petroleum, cylinders and drums.

VDES received the distress call at approximately 11 a.m. on Friday, Sept. 17. HMO Richard Parker had arrived on scene prior to the initial hazmat call to assist in gathering information about the rising waters. He then conferred with Ralph Jones, director of Technological Hazards, and HMO Ray Haring, and confirmed that the downtown area was flooded and that drums, above-ground fuel storage tanks, LP-gas cylinders, and as much as 120,000 gallons of petroleum products were in the water moving rapidly downstream.

HMO Haring responded with members of the Southside Hazmat Team and three boats. The boats were put into service in the downtown area with instructions to provide reconnaissance information back to HMO Haring and to safely secure any leaking containers. This nautical reconnaissance continued for the next week.

Due to the magnitude of this incident, resources were also called in from all over the Commonwealth, including many local, state and federal agencies. The news media was also on scene in full force.

Consequently, responders not only had to deal with the hazards of the incident but also had to interact with local fire and police; state police; National Guard; the Environmental Protection Agency; FEMA; U.S. Coast Guard; the departments of Environmental Quality, Health, Game and Inland Fisheries, and Forestry; the Marine Resources Commission and private contractors. In all, some 250-350 responders descended daily on the city of Franklin to assist with the situation.

Each day presented new challenges as the equipment, manpower and situation status changed. Responders were diverted from the original task of drum recovery to deal with several other issues including leaking containers, a fuel farm with an 18,000-gallon

**S**oon after the winds howled and the docile Nansemond River burst over its banks, the Suffolk Disaster Recovery Task Force mobilized to speed restoration of the community from Hurricane Floyd.

As Floyd hammered the coastal plain, Jeff Messinger called Linda Wakefield, a training coordinator at Century Services, to call out the Suffolk Local Disaster Recovery Task Force. Messinger's local disaster recovery task force had been in the works well before the storm broke. When Floyd arrived, they knew what to do.

"Jeff called and asked me if I could get on the phone and spread the word," says Wakefield, who has volunteered for the past three years at a domestic violence shelter. "We got an unbelievable response from the community."

After the storm, mud, mosquitoes and a rotting mess soon made life miserable. Federal and state disaster relief poured into the city of 67,000, which sustained more than \$13 million in damage to roadways, crops, businesses and homes.

The aid doesn't cover all the costs and time needed to get people back in their homes, businesses in operation and repairs made — to uncomplicate the complications a hurricane imposes on everyday basics.

Suffolk's recovery team's response has served as a model for the region since they were the first to be fully active.

"They expanded their local disaster recovery task force into a dynamic organization ready to meet the unmet needs of their community," Selby C. Jacobs, coordinator, state Disaster Recovery Task Force, said. "The task force represents a cross section of that community."

"They started with a few people gathered into a room Friday night. By 10 o'clock, they

were in a circle, setting the mission and priorities just like they'd been in business the whole year."

Drawing on information banks, the task force compiled lists of available resources and where to find them. "Once we had the resource package together, then we could see how to address the needs and not duplicate what other agencies were doing," Wakefield said.

For the clean up, the Task Force helped locate cleaning kits consisting of mops, sponges and bleach, and find volunteers to clean up the mess.

Advance preparation for disaster, before the storm arrives and sweeps away everything in front of it, may make the difference between life and death, a home saved and a home destroyed.

Since 1996's Hurricane Fran, VDES has intensified the effort to help localities storm-proof their communities.

The state Disaster Recovery Task Force does more than help a community get through the disaster. To make the community disaster-resistant, residents and businesses must correct the problems that made the damage and loss worse than it needed to be.

"We follow FEMA's direction in working to establish resilient and disaster-resistant communities," Jacobs says. "The ultimate responsibility for disaster recovery lies with the local community."

In Suffolk's case, readiness paid off. When help was needed, they had the resources lined up.

"They were able to bring to bear what they needed for long-term recovery and to rebuild the infrastructure and the business community," Jacobs says.

"Suffolk went a step further in developing a dynamic leadership group. The Suffolk task force created the ability to do the job."

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# Training Calendar

## Emergency Management

**Adjunct Instructor Workshop**  
November 4/ Richmond

## Reservist Training

**Emergency Information  
Systems Sustainment Training**  
November 4/Richmond

**VEOC Tabletop Exercise**  
November 4/Richmond

**Reservist Update Seminar**  
November 9/Richmond

**Information and Planning  
Branch Workshops**  
December 8/Richmond

## Technological Hazards

**Advanced Hazardous Materials  
Control**  
November 15-19/Ashland

**Chemistry of Hazardous  
Materials**  
November 29-December 10/ TBA

## Search and Rescue

**SAR Council**  
October 30/Richmond

**SAR Management Conference**  
October 30-31/Richmond

**GSAR Institute (Part II)**  
November 12-14/Jamestown

## High Water (cont'd from p. 3)



*Washing off the residue. A responder passes through the decontamination station after exposure to the floodwaters (FEMA News Photo, Liz Roll).*

aboveground fuel storage tank leaking fuel oil, several submerged fuel tanker trucks and one overturned tanker.

Also looming on the horizon was a large-scale incident involving spontaneous combustion of 11 million pounds of wet, fermenting peanuts stored at a peanut warehouse.

Though teams were finally able to drive into the city on Sept. 25, the water hazards were replaced by other challenges.

Tasks included surveying the surrounding rivers for additional containers; coordinating with Norfolk Southern Railway Company and IMS Environmental to remove drums on railroad right of way; drilling and off-loading a fuel tanker truck; responding to several LP-gas leaks; and re-monitoring of several facilities housing chemicals to ensure that the buildings were safe to enter.

On Wednesday, Sept. 29, responders finally brought the hazmat portion of this incident under control — one of the most dynamic situations the VDES hazmat program has ever encountered.

In two weeks, response teams retrieved more than 500 containers, controlled approximately 100 leaking containers and logged more than 3,000 man-hours without injuries.

## In the Spotlight (continued from page 6)

**T**eacher makes the grade. **Robert A. (Robbie) Symons**, chief of the Rockingham County department of fire and rescue and deputy emergency services coordinator, recently received an Emergency Management Institute Certificate of Achievement for successfully completing "Professional Development Series" training.

Symons has been with Rockingham County since 1981 and is a regular adjunct instructor for VDES. He had completed the necessary courses some time ago and was unaware, until recently, that the training he had attended and, in some cases taught for VDES, qualified him for the PDS certificate.

VDES Training Coordinator Gordon Barwell presented the certificate before the Rockingham County Board of Supervisors in September. He praised Symons for his dedication in the emergency management field and highlighted his willingness to train others to better prepare for disaster response and recovery.



*True Achiever. Chief Robbie Symons (left) receives his EMI certificate from VDES Training Coordinator Gordon Barwell. (Courtesy photo)*



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